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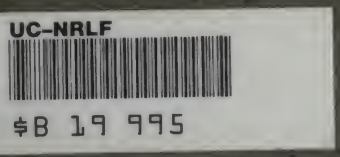

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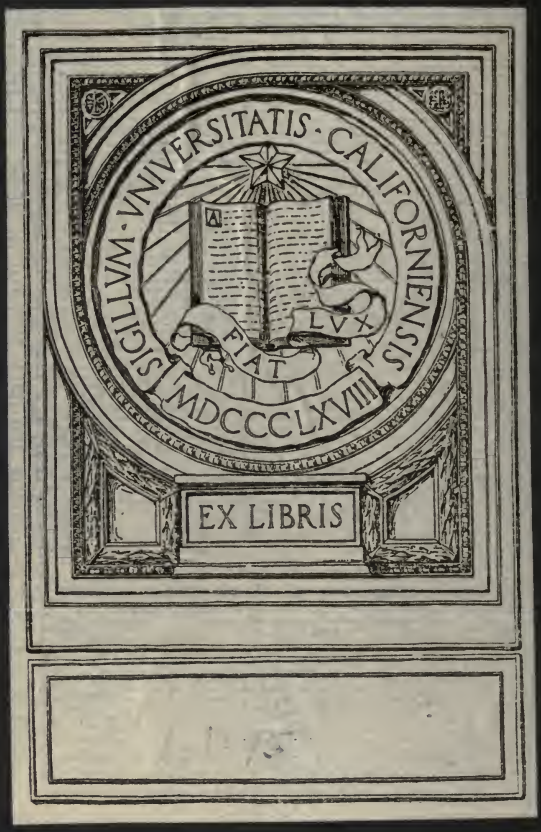
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MODERN WAR AND PEACE

A Lecture delivered to
The Cambridge University War and
Peace Society
December 2, 1912

[The Rev. H. Montagu Butler, D.D., Master of Trinity, in the Chair]

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MODERN WAR AND PEACE

I want to read to you a passage from the work of a living writer with whom you all should be, and probably are, well acquainted.

I must ask you to put yourselves for a moment in the position of men, nearing home, after a long sea voyage and running up channel before a strong south-westerly gale. This is the passage I wish to quote:

"At night the headlands retreated, the bays advanced into one unbroken line of gloom. The lights of the earth mingled with the lights of heaven; and above the tossing lanterns of a trawling fleet a great lighthouse shone steadily, such as an enormous riding light burning above a vessel of fabulous dimensions. Below its steady glow, the coast, stretching away straight and black, resembled the high side of an indestructible craft riding motionless upon the immortal and unresting sea. The dark land lay alone in the midst of the waters, like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights—a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives—a ship freighted with dross and with jewels, with gold and with steel. She towered up immense and strong, guarding priceless traditions and untold suffering, sheltering glorious memories and base forgetfulness, ignoble virtues and splendid transgressions. A great ship! For ages had the ocean battered in vain her

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enduring sides; she was there when the world was vaster and darker, when the sea was great and mysterious, and ready to surrender the prize of fame to audacious men. A ship mother of fleets and nations! The great flagship of the race; stronger than the storms, and anchored in the open sea."

I hope you will agree that these eloquent words describe a love of country, a form of patriotism, of which no one has cause to be ashamed, not blatant or vulgar, but respectable, sincere and true.

If I thought that Norman Angell's teaching sapped the foundations of patriotism such as this, or tended to destroy the love of individual or national liberty, or weakened the desire of young men to learn the art of fighting for the purpose of protecting their homes and the homes of their kindred oversea from attack or conquest, I should not be here to-night.

If I thought that in the world's present state of martial unrest, his teaching would induce our people to abandon building those great fleets that preserve these Islands from attack and keep the ocean way free for British commerce, I should look upon Norman Angell as an enemy of our race and country.

For more years than I care to count I have been engaged in helping to perfect the machinery of war, and to sharpen the weapons with which men on the sea and land go out to maim and kill one another. May I then put it thus, that I am here because in the big affairs of mankind, logic holds a subordinate place, and because inconsistency happens to be the rule of active and healthy life.

No sane mind can fail to be aware that we are not living in an ideal world, but in a world of hard and brutal facts ; and the hardest and most brutal of all these facts is, that after 2000 years of philosophy and of Christ's teaching, men are still governed mainly by passion and only occasionally by reason. Fortunately there is no cause to despair. The mill grinds slowly, but the wheel keeps moving.

I am not proposing to discuss with you the philosophy of Norman Angell's thesis, but rather its practical bearing upon the relation of European States under normal conditions, as we find them to-day, and especially upon the circumstances of Great Britain and her immediate neighbours on the continent of Europe.

Napoleon called war a drama. He used that phrase when thinking of the great European conflicts of which he himself was the moving spirit and protagonist. We should rather say that modern war between civilized peoples, enlightened as they are in these days, and interdependent as they are upon each other, is not a Drama but a Tragedy only comparable to some immortal Trilogy in which men, from no fault of their own, but owing to a deep inherited tendency, find themselves enmeshed in the web of Fate.

Are we not justified in taking this view when we consider that to-day in Europe no Potentate or Statesman desires war, that the masses of the people in every powerful State dislike War and fear it, and that nevertheless we constantly find ourselves shivering on its brink ? Some glimmering of reason warns

us that War, and as Norman Angell explains even victorious war, spells disaster, and yet we speak of it always as inevitable and sometimes with expectancy. If George Meredith is justified in saying that "when men's brains are insufficient to meet the exigencies of affairs, they fight," you can well understand that given the casual methods of politicians and the clouded atmosphere of political strife, the failure of reason to withstand the assault of prejudice and passion is not so strange or unaccountable.

Norman Angell is engaged in the difficult task of strengthening, of putting a higher degree of vitality into the rational consideration of the problems of War and Peace. When considering and analysing his brilliant and often dazzling argument, we must not permit ourselves to forget that in private life the measure, the balance of loss and gain, although telling in the long run, does not by any means always dominate men's actions. If this were not the case, how explain the spendthrift and the gambler?

Similarly, economic forces, in spite of their predominant results, over long spaces of time, do not from day to day and from hour to hour govern the policy of nations, or nullify the effects of sentiment, of passion or of resentment. These are the lions in the path of Peace.

If, therefore, we are calmly and with profit to discuss the "Great Illusion," as Mr Norman Angell has called his essay upon the economic results to both vanquished and victor in a war between highly civilized European States, we should, I suggest to

you, keep steadily in our own minds the realities of life, and make it clear to ourselves that we are not living in a philosophic vacuum.

Men write and speak of disarmament. The most ardent advocate of peace, if to-morrow he were called to the helm of state, and were to find himself made answerable for the security of these Islands, and faced with their vast population, and their historic past, with the pledges given by their statesmen to subject races, and the potentialities of their future, could not in the present condition of Europe and of the world, venture to disarm.

Further, if he were conscientious, prudent and frank, he would explain to his countrymen the dangers they are bound to provide against, and the risks they periodically run, owing to their inveterate love of minding other people's business, coupled with their own complacent faith in luck and in their capacity to pull through any emergency; and having done this he would set about perfecting our National Defences. This has always been the hard fate of the pacifist statesman, who was not a mere theorist, when brought up short by the actualities of the world.

I am well aware that another view may be taken of the duty of a protagonist in the cause of Peace. It may be said that a Statesman worthy of the name, and caring above all Causes for that of Peace should not fear to put his faith to the touch. A firmer belief in the verity of his cause, a loftier conception of the power of ideas over men's actions, a deeper insight into the results of confidence on a

grand scale, would lead him to the conclusion that to disarm was not to run any desperate risk, and that even if that were the case, he should be ready to take it. See, such a man would argue, the effect in other but analogous spheres, of a sublime trust in the higher motives and instincts of mankind, and observe the recent examples in the history of our race and land. He might admit that analogy is generally a trap for the unwary, but he would emphasize the history of the past few decades, and show that trust in the people, that great political discovery of the nineteenth century, has never miscarried. For instance, although it is generally admitted that political power, to be well and safely used should only be entrusted to an educated people, who is unaware that our statesmen enfranchise first and educate afterwards? Yet it would be difficult to prove that as a Nation we should have made better progress if the Educational Acts of 1870 had preceded the Reform Bill of 1832.

In recent years there has been even a more glaring case of the noble chance that high statesmanship permits itself occasionally to take. It required a mighty act of faith to grant a free constitution to South Africa and to entrust unfettered political powers to the people we had just fought and defeated. Yet, there are not many men who would now propose to go back upon that courageous and disinterested policy.

This would be the argument of our idealist, and he would refer, with great force, to these examples

of a political faith that has been able successfully to move mountains of political prejudice.

We can perhaps none of us imagine any policy finer and more noble in conception, than the reasoned determination of a great People convinced of the folly of War, to disarm, for the sake of example, in the face of the armed nations of the European continent. It is a sad but inevitable anti-climax to have to conclude that the adoption by any responsible statesman of such a policy would be not only one of madness, and of grave self-indulgence, but of national betrayal. I fear that the pages of our own history, the bitter teaching of experience and a clear conception of that world of actuality of which the British Nation forms part, can only lead us to the conclusion that however ardently we desire the Norman Angell propaganda to force its way into the minds of men, we cannot during the years of inevitable transition afford to cast away the sword.

The risk is one from which the most courageous idealist would rightly shrink. After all, if the experiment in South Africa had failed, its failure might have plunged this country into serious difficulties, but the problem of British rule would still have been soluble, and no irremediable harm would have been done.

On the other hand, to disarm, by way of political experiment, and to find your experiment fail would be to inflict such complete disaster and such irrecoverable losses upon our country that no Englishman can bear to contemplate them, and no statesman would dare to face them.

There is some analogy, good enough for our purpose, between the conditions of Europe to-day and the condition of England in the Middle Ages, cursed with the internecine conflicts of the Baronage. What feudal lord would then have dared, within the disturbed area of these Islands, to level his defences, in reliance upon the generous appreciation or upon the pacific instincts of his neighbours? It was not by that path that peace was sought and ensued. In order to bring to a conclusion the state of normal warfare then prevailing, and in order to substitute the procedure of a higher civilization for methods of barbarism, it required external pressure from our Tudor Sovereigns, drastic in method and consistent in application.

In order to pacificate Europe, in order to hold in check the militant ardour of diplomatic chancelleries and the recklessness of a combative Press, to what quarter can we then look to provide a substitute for the commercial instincts of a Tudor King backed by the energies of a growing Middle Class and of a long-suffering peasantry? To what powerful influences can we turn, with hope and expectancy that they will put an end to those armed and provocative relations between the great Powers in Europe that to-day reflect sadly upon our common civilization?

This brings me by a process which I hope has not been too tiresome, to the objects and aims of the Society which I have the honour to address.

If, as I indicated a few moments ago, the strongest influence at the present time upon the actions of civilized nations is educated public opinion, and if,

as some contend, ideas have never exercised a more potent sway over events than now, it is to this irresistible force of public opinion that we must look for an equivalent to the power that crushed feudalism with all its combativeness and unrest.

It is the main object of your Society to create and to educate public opinion. It is not, as I understand, your sole object. There is a preliminary task to be performed by your members before you let loose the spirit of your propaganda. That preliminary task is, I gather from your literature, to test Norman Angell's theories by the means of discussion and examination, and especially to enquire into the truth of his contention that what were axioms of statesmanship in the eighteenth century have become absurdities in the twentieth.

The most distinguished of the living sons of this University put the case to me thus: "The doctrine, which, as I understand it, Norman Angell desires to impress upon the civilized nations of the world is that aggressive warfare, undertaken for the purpose of making the aggressor happier, wealthier and more prosperous, is not only wrong but silly."

That is the doctrine which your Society has been formed to examine, and if you are satisfied that it is true to testify before the world.

I am not concerned with and I am anxious to refrain from discussing the various aspects of the "Great Illusion." I have only mentioned its main thesis in order to make clear that the primary work of this Society is to examine the practical effect of the economic aspects of that work and to carry

forward to a further stage such truths as may be found in Norman Angell's economics which can be of service to this country and to mankind.

When I was an undergraduate of this College no one was ever invited to examine an economic theory. In those days we were taught that political economy was an exact science and it would never have occurred to any but the most cynical to question the main propositions of its votaries. You live, fortunately for yourselves, in an atmosphere of more enlightened criticism. It is desirable, indeed it is essential, that every point made by Norman Angell should be subjected to careful scrutiny if his doctrine is ever to be translated into the language of practical statesmanship. When for instance he makes such a statement as this—"that the wealth of conquered territory *always* remains in the hands of the inhabitants"; and when he proceeds to draw the inference that no territory is therefore worth annexing, I suggest to you that considerable qualification must be made before such a doctrine will be accepted by those responsible for the direction of state affairs in this or any other country. It is unlikely, it is scarcely possible for a man to write with such enthusiasm and with such fulness as Norman Angell without occasionally creating a false impression of his real meaning, but among your Society's functions is the invaluable one of winnowing the wheat from the chaff.

May I suggest to you a specially dangerous misunderstanding to which Norman Angell's argument may also lead. He lays much stress upon

the effects of war upon the individual as distinct from the nation. He draws attention over and over again to the condition of the individual citizen of a victorious or conquered state. Would this man be richer or poorer?—Would that man profit or lose by victory or defeat?—are questions which he is continually posing. They are indeed worth examination and there is perhaps no surer method of guiding the discussions of your Society along a path consistent with our national safety than for you to consider how far a nation, which undoubtedly is composed of individuals, is a corporate reality, and to what extent as a corporate reality it is able to suffer or to triumph.

Norman Angell would, I am sure, be the last to claim that he has exhausted his own subject. What he has done is to write a remarkable and stimulating book that cannot fail to produce practical results in the hands of men, of younger men, who come after him.

Years ago Professor Seeley in his "Expansion of England" produced a work that in the hands of Cecil Rhodes, as Rhodes himself often admitted, led directly to the addition of Rhodesia to the Empire and indirectly to the unity of South Africa under the British flag. The "Expansion of England" focused the eyes of our people on the work they had been unconsciously performing. The British Empire had grown and was growing fast but its growth was, pictorially speaking, silent and unperceived. Professor Seeley's book illumined the process, and among its many effects produced that to which I have already

alluded. In that case the voice was Seeley's but the hands were those of Cecil Rhodes. It may be that among those present here to-night there may be one, who, stimulated by the discussions of your Society and assisted by its propaganda will do for the cause of European peace what Cecil Rhodes did for the further expansion of our Empire. In that case the voice will have been Norman Angell's, but the hands we must leave to the future to determine.

Of one thing I am convinced, and it is that the moment is not unripe, and that the minds of men at home and all over the continent are in a state of singular receptivity for this economic aspect of the doctrine of Peace.

I have had an opportunity of listening to very confidential enquiries into, and discussions of, the economic effects upon our trade, commerce and finance on the outbreak of a European war in which we ourselves might be engaged. This enquiry extended over many months, and many of the wealthiest and most influential men of business from the cities of the United Kingdom were called to give evidence before those whose duty it was to conclude and report.

I am sure that very few, if any, of those eminent witnesses had read his book, but by some mysterious process the virus of Norman Angell was working in their minds, for one after the other, these magnates of commerce and of finance, corroborated by their fears and anticipations, the doctrine of the "Great Illusion."

If this is the mental atmosphere of the cities of

London and Glasgow at the prospect of War, is it not reasonable to assume that the moment is propitious, and that there is a tremendous chance for young and ardent spirits, just of your age, to reap a splendid harvest ?

And if we look abroad, across, let us say, the North Sea, the conditions are equally favourable. It is well known that in August, 1911, this country was on the brink of war. What is not so well known is, that the most powerful and restraining force exercised in Germany in the interests of Peace, was the influence of the great commercial and financial houses that have done business with our people, that have competed with our people, over the surface of the globe, and who are in the habit of looking to London as their clearing house, and to English financial houses as their bankers and correspondents.

Germany, I am confident, will prove just now as receptive as Great Britain to the doctrine of Norman Angell.

A few moments ago I mentioned a certain enquiry into the various aspects and effects of modern War, at which persons of distinction were present, some of them holding offices of great responsibility, but who up to the present had not been specially concerned with these questions or specially obliged to consider them.

It was interesting to see how little at first they grasped the realities of modern war. They were under the impression, quite a vague impression, that war was a business in which soldiers and sailors were deeply concerned but which left ordinary

civilians free to pursue their avocations under more or less normal conditions. They remembered the South African war and recollected how even in the last weeks of 1899 and the first weeks of the present century, when our armies in South Africa were in some jeopardy, business and even pleasure went on very much as usual. They were also aware that in the Crimean and Napoleonic wars, when British armies were fighting on the continent of Europe, some ripple of the hardships then endured reached these shores, but the civilian population left the fighting to the professional soldier and beyond paying the bill felt very little the worse for the conflict.

Modern war, however, seemed now to be an altogether different proposition. It was quite a novel idea that war with a nation in arms like modern Germany, under modern conditions of trade and finance, might mean, even under favourable circumstances, complete stoppage of our continental and of our imperial trade, the temporary ruin of tens of thousands of operatives in the midland and northern counties, and the closing of the Thames to British shipping, with incalculable results to the provision of supplies for London and the home counties, and in fact complete confusion in the domestic economy of the state. Still more startling was the vision of a possible transfer, perhaps permanently, from London to New York of that enormous mass of financial business which on behalf of the whole mercantile and commercial world we at present transact in the metropolis of our Empire.

As I have said it was a surprise to these men of eminence and experience in the government of the country that modern war on a large scale, even if successfully waged, might demand such enormous sacrifices from the civilian population. They had always hitherto believed that all the pains and penalties of war could be imposed upon a professional class that was paid and trained to bear them. This delusion is unfortunately shared by millions of our fellow countrymen and it should be one of the functions of your Society to destroy it. The economic effects, in minute detail, likely to be immediately experienced in Great Britain, in Canada, and in Australia, on the outbreak of a war between Great Britain and Germany are well worth your attention and some study at the hands of Norman Angell himself. In short, the more the circumstances attending the outbreak of modern war between highly civilized communities are enquired into and studied the better are the chances of the maintenance of peace. These considerations all help to create an atmosphere for your propaganda.

Even the grouping of the six most powerful States in Europe into two apparently hostile camps is on the whole some guarantee of peace. There is always, as I have said, a chance of some act of madness precipitating a war. But on the whole the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente have their origin in a desire to avoid war. From one point of view these well-known expressions indicate two great armed camps, but from another they imply two groupings of nations anxious to keep the peace.

In this very grouping of the Powers there is good augury for the future. If you could imagine Europe to consist at this moment of only Great Britain, France and Russia, all of them haunted by some external menace from the Far East or West, there would be no overwhelming difficulty in obtaining agreement to a plan of internal disarmament that would reduce the fear of conflict within the area of Europe to a negligible quantity while leaving the combined Powers practically secure from attack oversea.

If Europe consisted to-day only of Germany, Austria and Italy it might perhaps be even less difficult for these Powers to arrive at a similar understanding. Is it too extravagant a suggestion that an agreement based on partial disarmament which appears not wholly impracticable within the orbit of the Triple Alliance on the one hand, or that of the Triple Entente on the other, might still be practical and possible if the two groups could be drawn together by the centrifugal force of some great explanatory and illuminating doctrine? I am making no attempt to argue or elaborate but merely to throw out this suggestion for examination and discussion by your Society.

Finally I cannot refrain from touching upon the panoply of war, and its allurements. This is a point I believe ignored by Norman Angell but which demands some consideration from you. No one can be blind to those martial qualities of valour and self-sacrifice that war demands of her victims, but it too frequently happens that men enamoured of peaceful

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avocations, and zealous in the cause of peace, are apt to under-estimate, among antagonistic forces, the strength of the poetic and romantic aspects of the clash of arms. One cannot avoid the suspicion that to ignore and even to minimize these attributes of a martial phase in the world's progress and in the evolution of mankind, is to display an enfeebled spirit and an impoverished imagination. There is very little to be said for a man who can look unmoved upon a shrine raised by infinite pains and with immeasurable labour, to a dying faith.

I am reminded[1] of a passage in a lecture delivered many years ago (it shows how sometimes a phrase sticks in a boy's mind) by a famous master in the old round school at Eton, a room that no one present here to-night probably remembers except myself. He was speaking of the landing of William of Orange in Torbay, and the phrase was this:—"All the poetry, all the romance, all the beauty, was on the side of the Stuarts"; then the Lecturer paused, and added: "All the common sense was on the other side." There is no need for me to point the moral.

The title of your Society appears to me to cover a duty and an aspiration; the duty of every young man sound in heart and mind, to submit himself to be trained to bear arms for his home and country against unprovoked attack;—an aspiration that he may personally help to allay the provocative spirit in men of his own race, and live to utilize every ounce of intellectual and moral strength in the cause of Peace.

[1] By a friend with a better memory than mine.

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